

# Lessons from the military life

*Ed Abdella is the track and cross-country coach at Lamar School, where he also teaches world history. He served 15 months in Iraq as company 1st sergeant with the 282nd Quartermaster Company based in Montgomery, Ala. He received a Bronze Star for bravery. He has served in the military for 20 years and plans to retire in May.*

**By Ed Abdella**  
special to The Star

In my senior year of high school, I was planning to attend UConn, the University of Connecticut, and my father wanted me to go to Western Connecticut.

He said why don't you go to Western Connecticut, it is just down the street? We got into a bit of an argument, and I told him I would think about it.

I ended up just joining the military. I was 17 when I went down to sign up, and my parents had to give their permission. They said, 'If this is what you want, we are behind you.' I joined the 82nd Airborne Division in Fort Bragg, N.C.

It was a difficult transition for me. I was not the best soldier. I didn't have any discipline problems, it was just a different way of life for me.

But if it was not for the military, I would not be where I am today. I tell kids that all the time. It made me grow up and appreciate things that I never did before.

Being away from home and my family was the most difficult thing. No one wants to leave home.

## Army life

After three years with the regular army, I joined the Reserves as a drill sergeant at Clemson University.

I ended up graduating from Western Connecticut State University, long after the military. It is kind of funny when you look at it now, I was fighting with my dad, who wanted me to go to Western, and look where I finished.

I stayed in the Reserves after graduating college, there was talk about Officer Candidate School. I just never had the desire to become an officer. I wanted to become a command sergeant major.

In 1990, I volunteered and was picked up and went to the first Gulf War. I spent 7½ months over there as an E5 with a military police unit.

I returned to my original drill sergeant unit, and I spent some time in Connecticut



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

## ROLE MODEL

Coach Ed Abdella of Lamar School, right, watches Russ Patterson, front left, Sarah Summers, Madiha Ahmad, Drew Robertson, back left, Cameron Sherrill and Tyler McMillan at track practice.

before coming down to Mississippi where I started teaching.

I stayed with the Reserves as a trainer for six years out of Hattiesburg in Camp Shelby, where we trained people to prepare for war. I made rank at Camp Shelby and made my 1st sergeant in 2001 and went to Montgomery, Ala., where I was attached to the 282nd.

## Called to action

After 3½, things kind of went haywire, and I stayed in the unit I was in. We got the call in January 2003 that we were going to prepare to go over to Iraq.

I had already been and I had three soldiers who had been in the first Gulf War, so we were able to train our soldiers in customs and common courtesies of the Arab nation.

I told them what it was going to be like, especially in Kuwait. We had gone from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait in the first war, but it has totally changed from the first war. It was kind of luxurious in Kuwait.

We left in February or March, after the war had started, and we were attached to the third infantry division. In May, the war was over, and we were pushed up to a place called Balad.

It is a town 35-45 miles north of Baghdad. We were in a camp called Camp Anaconda, where one of the units from Meridian was.

We did force protection at Camp Anaconda. We did convoy security, and we anticipated doing that until November or December and going home.

In December, we got wind that one of the units nabbed Saddam (Hussein), and for us, it was a glorious day. It was neat to be on the same road as those guys who nabbed Saddam.

We ended up leaving in May, and we had been all over the country of Iraq.

## Back home

I've had a good career. I enjoy it and I have no regrets.

I learned honor and integrity in the military. I never blame someone else for anything. Like with my students, if anything happens in my classroom, it is my responsibility; it is my fault.

You have to take responsibility for you and your actions, and that is what the military has taught me. I try to instill that into my students and the members of my teams.

Every day I am able to bring in every aspect of my military experience with my kids.

I talk about how there are kids right now who are going overseas to fight for their country just so they can go to college. Most of these kids don't have to worry about getting into college, and I want them to not take that for granted.

We talk about honor, integrity and having strong self-esteem. I tell them little stories from my time in the military to help highlight the point I'm trying to make.

It's the same with my teams. I am able to use what I have learned in the military to help motivate them.

I'm out there running with them, and when you see some 40-year-old, fat guy running with them, it makes them want to run.

That's what makes me successful. I can show the kids drive and determination. I've also been blessed with great runners and kids with a lot of drive.

I love my job at Lamar. I've been here for 10 years, and I have no desire to go anywhere else. I told them when I left there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think of Lamar.

I think that is what makes a good teacher. It is also another thing I learned in the military — loyalty.

## SPEAK UP

*Here is what some of Coach Ed Abdella's athletes and students at Lamar School have to say about him.*

"He's dedicated, and he runs with us while we are training. There are not a lot of coaches that I know of who do that with their team."

**Cameron Sherrill, junior**

"One of the people I know who got down and fought is coach Ed Abdella. He was sent out sometime during my eighth-grade year and just came back at the end of the last school year. The whole school is glad that he is back. He has resumed his teaching and coaching duties again. He is my world history teacher this year."

"I would like to again thank all the troops for everything that they have done for this country. We all hope that they come home soon!"

**Adam Gough, sophomore**

"He's the only coach I know who does the stuff that he tells us to do. He always makes the practices fun. He will call us 'knuckleheads' and make up nicknames for us."

**Elaine Clark, senior**

"I learned a lot of what I know about the war from my history teacher, Ed Abdella. He is a 1st sergeant in the Army and got back home this past summer. I learned a different view on the war than the one that is in the news. That is why I simply want to say 'thank you.'"

"Many of you are full-time soldiers, others of you are in the Reserves, like Ed Abdella. But all of you have a common goal in mind, and that is to ensure freedom to the Iraqi people — just as you have already ensured mine."

**Tyler Touchstone, sophomore**